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# BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE:
## ASSESSING A REGIONAL APPROACH TO CANADIAN DEFENCE POLICY

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In the post-9/11 security environment, the central mission of a variety of US government departments and agencies has become 'homeland security' (HLS). The latter refers to the "prevention, preemption, and deterrence of, and defense against, aggression targeted at US territory...as well as the management of the consequences of such aggression".[1] According to this definition, homeland security is an overarching concept that requires a broad range of capabilities to protect US citizens from harm. These may include, *inter alia*, robust intelligence, law enforcement and public health capacities.

The US armed forces also play a role within the homeland security concept. To differentiate their activities from those of their civilian counterparts, the use of force for the purpose of homeland security, at home and abroad, is referred to as 'homeland defence'.

The need to reduce the US sense of homeland vulnerability will shape Canadian policy options. This is largely due to Canada's geo-strategic position in North America. On the one hand, Canada's economic security is dependent on trade with the United States. If Canada even appears to represent a potential security liability to the US, the possibility of a severe disruption of trade cannot be ruled out. On the other hand, Canadian sovereignty demands a policy that minimizes US security concerns regarding Canada. Otherwise, the US will simply act to protect its own security to the potential detriment of Canada's interests.

It is therefore in Canada's interest that Washington's concerns over its homeland security be minimized. To this end, the Canadian Forces (CF) will almost certainly play a role similar to the homeland defence function of its American counterpart - this despite the years of chronic under-funding which have placed significant limitations on current and future capabilities.

The climate of fiscal conservatism in Ottawa makes a substantial increase in defence spending unlikely. This will result in a growing retrenchment of Canadian defence capabilities, and bring into question the continued viability of a Canadian military commitment to domestic, continental, and wider international security. In the end, defence planners may have to make some very difficult decisions on the range of Canadian military capabilities to be retained, and the types of missions the CF should be expected to undertake.[2]

Given resource limitations, continental defence requirements may provide a reasonable guide as to the military capabilities that the Canada *must* retain for its own security and sovereignty. This does not mean that Canadian security policy will be confined to North America. Resources for diplomacy and development assistance will ensure that Canada is engaged internationally. Some of the military capabilities for continental defence can also be used for international missions. But with a defence effort largely centred on Canada's immediate area of interest and responsibility, it will be easier to question Canada's 'internationalist' credentials.

### Homeland Security and the Rise of Asymmetrical Threats

Washington's interest in homeland security is based on an awareness of potential threats in the post-9/11 period. After the collapse of its superpower rival, the United States found itself vulnerable to a variety of unconventional threats that its traditional power assets could not adequately address. As pointed out by the US Commission on National Security in the 21st Century, "America is becoming increasingly vulnerable to hostile attack on our homeland – and our military superiority will not protect us".[3]

During much of the 1990s the US focussed on the potential danger posed by erratic or unstable regimes armed with significant conventional and, more importantly, unconventional weapons. These so-called 'rogue states' were often found in important geographical locations. This, combined with their quest for exotic weapons and long-range missiles, led Washington to devote greater attention to containing them.

By the turn of the century, non-state terrorist networks had begun to pose a qualitatively different threat from that posed by the more well-known insurgent organizations. The 'new' terrorists were often based in several countries simultaneously. Many were shown to have expansive, global intentions, leading them into conflict with those states

(particularly the US) considered to he responsible for the present global distribution of power. Their tactics also changed; they sought to inflict mass casualties and actively sought chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) weapons.[4]

The United States found the deterrence of both of these threats problematic. Terrorist networks were perceived as irrational and, due to their trans-national nature, difficult to target. Rogue states were also problematic. Under the Bush Administration, America has not been content to simply deter them in a conventional sense; it has raised the possibility of moving against them in a pre-emptive fashion, but without fear of decisive retaliation. This necessitated some degree of protection against CBRN weapons, at home and abroad.

The 9/11 attacks reinforced the severity of both threats. Al-Qaeda was able to successfully coordinate and execute mass casualty attacks on US soil. The possibility for an even deadlier attack involving CBRN weapons was considered all too real. Given the rogue states' continuing interest in unconventional weapons and delivery systems, combined with their track record in destabilizing neighbouring countries, a link between the two groups was seen as an ominous possibility by the administration.[5] Homeland security thus became the primary objective of the US government.

America's response to its perceived 'homeland' vulnerability has been multi-faceted. Domestically, it began a process of re-organizing the various civilian departments and agencies charged with the safety of the continental US. Personnel from 22 separate agencies were consolidated into the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

The homeland defence component was also re-organized with the creation of a US Northern Command (NORTHCOM). Established in part to render support to domestic authorities, its continental defence mandate has grown to involve land, maritime, and aerospace surveillance cooperation with Canada through the Bi-national Planning Group.

Lastly, the United States has undertaken a number of international operations in its global war on terrorism, ranging from the targeted killing of Al-Qaeda operatives in Yemen and growing military support for various governments (eg. Georgia, Philippines), to its military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

**The Canadian 'Homeland' Response**

In the post-9/11 security environment, Canadian policy has been significantly shaped by the US fixation on its domestic vulnerabilities. The events of 9/11 clearly demonstrated the capability of terrorists to launch mass casualty attacks in North America. While the target was the United States, the recent train bombings in Madrid demonstrate that allies of the US are clearly not immune, nor invulnerable to such attacks.

Terrorism has clearly become a concern for the Canadian government. But domestic security encompasses a much wider range of concerns than the threat, however real, posed by terrorist organizations. Organized crime, for example, has increasingly become connected to international criminal networks that are financially linked to, and indeed are often inseparable from, terrorist groups. Their activities range from theft and money laundering to weapon, drug, and human trafficking. Other potential threats include foreign economic espionage - an especially worrisome threat for a technologically advanced country like Canada – as well as natural disasters and disease outbreaks, which can cause tremendous damage to the Canadian economy and its citizens.[6]

Given Canada's strong economic ties to the United States, the need to secure the free flow of trade between the two countries is also of great interest to officials in Ottawa. Nearly 90% of Canadian exports go to the US, while 70% of Canadian imports are from its southern neighbour. Over US$1.4 billion of trade passes across the border each day.[7] This makes it imperative that Canada does not become or is even perceived to be a source of vulnerability to the United States. A terrorist attack on the United States would likely lead to severe restrictions on the free flow of trade between the two countries, and potentially catastrophic consequences for Canada's economic security.

While Canada's reasons for devoting attention to the homeland security imperative differ somewhat from those of its neighbour, its response has mirrored Washington's in many important ways. Ottawa has awoken to the need to enhance emergency preparedness and crisis management capabilities, and to coordinate its efforts with other levels of government. Immediately after 9/11, the government established the Ad Hoc Cabinet Committee on Public Security and Anti-Terrorism and allocated C$7.7-billion over a five-year period to boost domestic security.

To mitigate US concerns over a porous northern border, and to protect its own economic security, Canada and the United States signed the Smart Border Declaration, and developed a 30-point Smart Border Action Plan. These initiatives codified an approach based on risk-management, intelligence cooperation, joint programs with common standards, and a "common desire to move enforcement as far away from the physical border as possible."[8] More recent initiatives include the establishment of the Department for Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness (DPSEP); a National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister, and; the recent release of Canada's first national security policy.[9]

The emphasis on domestic and cross-border security has also had an impact on the CF. A Joint Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical (NBC) Company has been established to aid provincial authorities in the event of an NBC disaster. More recently, support has been expressed for the idea of using the Reserves as a crisis response force to be employed in the event of a terrorist attack.[10]

Meanwhile, continental defence cooperation with the United States has been a topic of more frequent discussion. Ballistic missile defence (BMD) is finally being discussed between the two countries. As previously mentioned, the Bi-National Planning Group has been stood up (and co-located at NORAD headquarters) to foster land, maritime, and intelligence co-operation between the two countries on an as-needed basis.[11]

But homeland security has not, in Ottawa's view, been achievable simply by confining its activities to the home front. Accordingly, the Canadian Forces have played a key 'forward defence' role in the US-led global war on terror. By attacking and disrupting the terrorist threat at its geographical source(s), Canada aims to prevent future attacks on North America. During Operation APOLLO, the CF was deployed as part of a US-led coalition to eliminate the Al-Qaeda

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threat from Afghanistan. More recently, the CF has played a leading role in the peace-support mission in Afghanistan (Operation ATHENA) to prevent Afghanistan's re-emergence as a terrorist sanctuary.

### Homeland Defence: A Regional Defence Policy?

In the post-9/11 security environment, the Canadian government has pursued a multi-faceted HLS strategy to complement that of the United States. This strategy includes a greater emphasis on military and non-military tools for the protection of domestic security, alongside a greater willingness to use the Canadian Forces for a variety of international missions that could be considered part of the homeland defence effort.

But the attention given to homeland defence comes at an ill-opportune moment for the Canadian Forces. Given the neglect in maintaining sufficient levels of capital expenditure, it is likely that the problems associated with platform obsolescence will grow. Prudent defence planning must take into account the possibility that the defence budget may neither rise nor be re-organized to maintain relevant capabilities. For this reason alone, some analysts have already begun to advocate a process of prioritization – to fund one branch of the Canadian Forces, while sacrificing the other two.[12]

The post-9/11 emphasis on homeland defence may provide a useful context for any restructuring of Canadian defence policy. To date, the CF's homeland defence role has seen it become more involved in domestic and North American affairs, as well as undertake interdiction operations in the Arabian Sea, and combat and peace-support operations in Afghanistan. The combination of mission profiles - protect Canadian domestic territory; work with the US to reduce shared continental vulnerability to potential threats, and participate in coalition operations to disrupt and root out terrorists internationally – may be the most effective way to safeguard continental North America from attack.

However the situation is far from ideal. The post-9/11 emphasis on homeland security has increased Canadian governmental responsibility and stretched already scarce resources. The possibility that the CF will *not* be given the necessary resources to prevent its further deterioration must be addressed. It would therefore be prudent to examine what capabilities – human, material, and financial – are absolutely vital to safeguard Canada's security and to constructively contribute the security of its most important trading partner.

Clearly, the Canadian Forces must prevent its aerospace from becoming a conduit through which US-bound threats may pass. The 9/11 attacks clearly demonstrated that mass casualty attacks from the air can be successfully executed by terrorist groups. To combat this threat, the Canadian Forces must maintain capabilities for aerospace surveillance and control. The former partially reside within the NORAD. Aerospace control also requires target identification of hostile targets and, if necessary, their destruction. Accordingly, a fighter aircraft fleet will be an indefinite requirement, though the quantity of these platforms and their associated infrastructure may be reduced as the fleet is renewed.

It is also in Canada's interest to continue cooperating and coordinating its response with that of the United States through standing agreements such as NORAD. But Canada must also be mindful of US plans for continental ballistic missile defence. The BMD function will likely be situated within NORAD, as the latter already has the surveillance and command infrastructure required to assess missile threats. If Canada refuses to participate in missile defence, NORAD will likely require some extensive restructuring in order to accommodate the different areas of responsibility. This may lead to a separate airspace arrangement, with Canadian participation, or even the end of any such bilateral arrangements.

The CF must also maintain its maritime surveillance and control capabilities, and tie in these efforts with the US to the greatest extent practicable. With high levels of ship traffic at their respective deep-water ports, both the US and Canada are acutely vulnerable to maritime threats. It is possible that a ship laden with explosives could arrive at a port and cause tremendous damage. Alternatively, such a ship could also be used for a short-range ballistic or cruise missile attack, or be the means of transport for CBNR materials, drugs and even people bent on carrying out acts of violence.

Platforms that offer some degree of situational awareness, and are capable of interdiction and enforcement, should be retained. This includes maritime aerial surveillance platforms, such as patrol aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles and long-range surface wave radar stations (currently being constructed in Newfoundland). Sea-based surveillance and enforcement platforms – including the fleet of relatively new *Halifax*-class frigates, *Victoria*-class submarines, and *Kingston*-class maritime coastal defence vessels (MCDVs) – should also be retained. The retention of *expeditionary* naval capabilities such as area air defence and at-sea replenishment might not be necessary.

In the event that a threat does materialize in North America, the CF must be prepared for a crisis response role. Responsibility will fall primarily on the Land Force, with the air force providing tactical airlift. It will not require strong combat capabilities, but rather capabilities geared towards low-intensity peacekeeping and stabilization missions. Renewed reserve forces, alongside units with some degree of specialization (eg. CBRN response, heavy engineering, logistics, counter-terrorism) would arguably be most useful. Given the potential damage that a significant attack in either Canada or the US would entail, arrangements for cross-border response and coordination should be enhanced.

Interestingly, the Canadian government seems to have focused on these 'continental defence' capabilities on a *de facto* basis from the 1990s until the present. It presided over a growth in command, control, and surveillance interoperability within NORAD. It also buttressed Canada's maritime forces with new vessels, purchased search-and-rescue helicopters, and launched upgrade programs for the CF-18 fighter fleet and the CP-140 maritime patrol aircraft. At the same time the combat power of the Land Force has withered, except in those areas deemed essential to operations other than war (OOTW).[13]

Of course, the Canadian government still employs the CF for 'forward defence'. Indeed, many of the platform renewal projects listed above are quite applicable to overseas operations. However, it is likely that this 'ideal' situation will become increasingly infeasible, and the defence of Canada and North America will be prioritized.

Even more importantly, future capital acquisitions will be guided not by their contribution to the projection of Canadian military power overseas, but rather by their role in securing the Canadian homeland. This could mean the acquisition of offshore patrol craft instead of frigates, surveillance aircraft instead of fighter jets, and few if any armoured vehicles. While Ottawa's currently tight fiscal environment may appear to necessitate a 'keep one service, jettison the others' prescription, an examination of the homeland security context in which defence planning must take place shows that this is an infeasible option. Canadian security requires the continuation of two or perhaps all three services, albeit with a re-balancing of roles and resources.

This may be beneficial for the defence budget, as the quantity of dual-use acquisitions like fighter aircraft could be reduced, and platforms with high replacement costs could be eliminated. Unfortunately, by retiring some of the tools with which Canada has sought to shoulder a portion of the international security burden, this would also mean an end to Canada's long tradition of forward defence. The reduction of Canada's 'footprint' overseas would bode ill for the collective effort to stabilize troubled parts of the globe.

## Conclusion

Facing an uncertain security landscape, with a restless neighbour to the south and limited resources for fostering security at home and abroad, Canada may be situated 'between a rock and a hard place'. Great efforts have been made to safeguard Canada's area of immediate interest, but further challenges await. Budgetary pressures will make a reconfiguration of the Canadian defence effort a virtual certainty. Ottawa's intention to review Canada's 'international policies' demands bold planning and the consideration of all options.[14]

Some scholars have argued for the prioritization of particular services. Rather than advocating a specific position, the author has explored the context in which a re-appraisal of Canadian defence policy will likely take place, and what the structural implications *may* be for the Canadian military. Given Washington's persistent emphasis on homeland security, and the importance Ottawa attaches to assuaging American concerns, the establishment of a *de facto* regionally-oriented defence policy is a possibility.

A regional defence policy does not mean an end to Canada's internationalist roles or aspirations. Overseas missions will likely have a prominent place in Canada's overall security framework, although they may amount to token contributions to multilateral operations. Ottawa may attempt to compensate by devoting more resources to diplomacy and development, in what effectively amounts to a two-dimensional approach to global security. Future governments may regard this as a cost-effective means of upholding Canada's image as a key actor on the international stage. If so, it an open question whether this will be enough to keep the threats of new century at bay.

## Notes:

[1]This definition can be found on the Northern Command website, at http://www.northcom.mil/index.cfm?fuseaction=s.homeland.

[2]See Philippe Lagassé, "Short-term Gain, Long-term Pain: The Canadian Defence Budget Dilemma," *Strategic Datalink*, No. 118 (March, 2004). Also see Andrew Richter, " 'Alongside the Best'? The Future of the Canadian Forces," *Naval War College Review*, Vol. LVI, No. 1 (Winter 2003).

[3]United States, Commission 21st Century, *New World Coming: American Security in the 21st Century* (Arlington, VA: Commission on National Security, 1999), 14. Quoted in Joel Sokolsky, "Sailing in Concert: The Politics and Strategy of Canada-US Naval Interoperability," *Choices*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Institute for Research in Public Policy, April 2002), 19.

[4]See David Rudd, "Super-terror," *Strategic Datalink*, No. 100 (November 2001).

[5]For more on the threat posed by rogue states armed with NBC weapons, see Keith B. Payne, *The Fallacies of Cold War Deterrence and a New Direction* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001) and Colin S.Gray, "Deterrence and Regional Conflicts: Hopes, Fallacies, and Fixes," *Comparative Strategy*, 17, 1 (January-March 1998. Rogue states have had a remarkable track record in regional destabilization – for example, Iranian support of numerous insurgencies and terrorist organizations in the Middle East, Libyan military intervention in the Horn of Africa (eg. Chad) and ties to a number of terrorist groups (eg. Irish Republican Army), North Korea's periodic attempts at destabilizing South Korea, and Iraq's instigation of the Iran-Iraq War and its invasion of Kuwait.

[6]These various threats are listed in *Securing an Open Society: Canada's National Security Policy* (Ottawa: Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, 2004).

[7]See Wendy Dobson, "Shaping the Future of the North American Economic Space: A Framework for Action," *C.D. Howe Institute Commentary*, No. 162 (April 2002).

[8]See Andre Belelieu, "The Smart Border Process at Two: Losing Momentum?" *Hemisphere Focus*, Vol. XI, No. 31 (December 10, 2003), 7.

[9]More information on these and other initiatives can be found on the DPSEP website, available at http://www.ocipep.gc.ca/home/index_e.asp.

[10]Major-General Ed Fitch, commander of the Land Force Restructure project, has stated that the Canadian Reserves will be trained and equipped as a homeland defence force. See "Canada's reserves to act as a homeland defence force: senior official," Globe and Mail Online (March 12, 2004), at http://www.globeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20040312.wforce0313/BNStory/Front/.

[11]See Philippe Lagassé, "Credit, Fault, Caution: The Canadian Forces and Continental Defence," in David Rudd and David S. McDonough, eds. *The 'New Security Environment': Is the Canadian Military Up To the Challenge?* (Toronto: The Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 2004).

[12]See Richter, " 'Alongside the Best'?". Also see Andrew Richter, "Strategic Ambitions and Fiscal Realities: Give the Navy Priority," *Policy Options* (April 2002). It should be noted that the Bi-National Planning Group was established as a way for Canada to reduce US pressure to expand NORAD's mandate to include land and maritime forces coordination. It remains to be seen whether the BPG remains in its present organizational form, or provides the foundation for an expanded NORAD. (It should be noted that NORAD was established from a Military Planning Group, partly as a way to relieve US pressure for greater bilateral airspace coordination.)

[13]For example, as money was channelled to communications, reconnaissance, and surveillance capabilities, as well as to the operations and maintenance accounts, armour and artillery units slid into obsolescence.

[13]For more on this issue, see *Securing an Open Society*.

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